Shelton State SOARing to New Heights
By Paul Tucker

Shelton State Community College is looking to bridge the academic gap between college and high school curriculum with its new program, the SOAR Institute.

SOAR, Student Opportunities for Achievement and Resources, was developed as a team effort among the Shelton State faculty, and plans are in place for it to be implemented as soon as the fall 2011 semester.

It is a current trend among college freshmen that they are inadequately prepared for college level curriculum. Shelton State is no exception as somewhere between 60-70% of all true freshmen, over the last three fall terms, have required developmental classes, according to a school report.

"We have many students who are not yet reaching their full potential as learners," said Dr. Peggy Shadduck Palombi, Dean of Academic Services.

SSCC President Dr. Mark Heinrich commissioned a team to provide a solution that would meet the needs of developmental students in October 2009. Faculty and staff who have experience working with this group of students were assembled on the team and began researching how best to meet the academic needs of their students.

"The SOAR Institute is an innovative approach which will provide opportunity for students to gain the necessary skills to be successful," Dr. Heinrich said.

Dr. Heinrich credits much of the SOAR institute to Shelton State’s good relationship with Dr. Hunter Boylan, Director of the National Center for Developmental Education. Shelton State has received a great deal of assistance from Dr. Boylan in developing the SOAR Institute, according to Dr. Heinrich.

Dr. Heinrich is not the only one who is optimistic about the SOAR Institute. Faculty and other administrative officials are also looking forward to the possibilities and opportunities that will be offered to the students of Shelton State.

"My hope is that we help these students fulfill their dreams of getting a college degree," said Annette Cook, SOAR Institute Director.

The SOAR Institute will concentrate on three areas to assist students: instruction, advising, and tutoring. Each of these areas will operate hand-in-hand for students to be assisted through all steps of their education.

The instruction phase will focus on classes for developmental students. Instructional coordinators will be in place and will work closely with Shelton’s instructors, as well as teach at least one developmental class.
The focal point of advising will be to assign students to one of three "Navigators" who will direct students during their entire time in developmental classes.

Tutoring is the final area of emphasis of the SOAR Institute, but will not be limited to students in developmental classes as it will be offered to all students at SSCC.

Cook's work as director will be to manage these areas and to work close with her staff to ensure student success, along with cooperating with local high schools to close the curriculum gap even more.

"Hearing students say we helped them in ways they haven’t been helped before will make all the work worthwhile," she said.

Even with all the work left to do, Cook has high hopes for SOAR and the future it can hold for the students of Shelton State.

"I am most enthusiastic about the difference we can make for our students," she stated. "I have no doubt that SOAR can help our students and I truly look forward to getting results."

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